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CIRCLE OF LIFE exists at every level of New Jersey politics. It all starts with a room, perhaps in a borough hall, county administration building, somewhere in Trenton, or in the back of a party headquarters. A room where big and small decisions are made.

When you first start out in politics, aspiring to be a person of influence, life begins standing in a hallway, gazing at a closed door.

Behind that door, people more important than you are determining important matters of public policy, making tactical decisions about who wins elections, doling out patronage and awarding contracts.

At this point, all you want to do is get through the door and inside that room.

When the moment finally arrives, and you’re inside the room, the first step is to find yourself sitting in a chair along the wall listening to others making decisions.

Wall sitters just want a seat at the table.

And if that happens, after you spend some time actively participating in the decision-making process, a new ambition sets in. Now you want to sit at the head of the table.

In New Jersey, the chair at the head of the table is a big deal. That’s when people get to listen to advice from all the other decision makers sitting at the table — and make the final call. Sometimes that’s real power. But after a while, all the person at the head of the table really wants to do is get out of the room.

When you get to the point where you can have people who work for you sitting at the head of the table — powerful people in their own right who walk out of the room, into the hallway, look at those eager to get in room, and call you to get your blessing — when you no longer have to actually sit in the room, watch the aspiring wall sitters, and all the others at the table — but you still get to call the shots — that is real power.

— DAVID WILDSTEIN, Editor, New Jersey Globe
AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS as a superpower in New Jersey politics, George Norcross has become a brand instead of just one man. The Norcross private label has tentacles throughout New Jersey.

Some of his operations are corporately operated, like Camden County. Others are from time to time run as a franchise of sorts. Every once in a while, the franchise goes off the reservation and signs on with someone else, but eventually they all return to the parent company.

Norcross has been in power longer than any other major player in New Jersey politics. He became a county chairman in 1989, and five months later a favorite son of Camden, Jim Florio, became the governor. In a way, the New Jersey State House became the first branch of the Norcross empire to open in Central Jersey. From time to time, Norcross had franchises in the Office of the Governor. That’s been gone since January 2018. But the real statewide power for Norcross is a branch office that some call the New Jersey Senate. The Senate is run by Steve Sweeney, a key member of the Norcross team.

Sweeney wields enormous power in the New Jersey Legislature. No bill may reach the floor for a vote without his consent; indeed, no bill may even get a committee hearing unless Sweeney approved of it. No gubernatorial nominee will be considered for confirmation if he isn’t on board.

Through Sweeney’s mastery of the Senate, Norcross has the ability – when he demands it – to stop Gov. Phil Murphy dead in his tracks.

And with Sweeney strong enough to secure the senate presidency for at least three more years, without anyone stepping forward to challenge him, Norcross’ power is solid until at least January 2024.
Critics say Norcross endured a setback this year when Democratic primary voters rejected his choice of candidates to challenge party-switching Rep. Jeff Van Drew in a South Jersey congressional district. That was more like a quest to make lemonade out of a couple drops of sweat, especially since Van Drew got re-elected anyway.

Norcross was never really a Van Drew fan – he resented having to drive out to Cape May County during the summer of 2001 to sell the gold bracelet-wearing dentist on running for a State Assembly seat – and the congressman’s switch to the GOP finally rid him of someone he considered a huge financial burden and a constant pain in the ass.

Frankly, Norcross doesn’t really care about another South Jersey congressional seat. His brother has one, and another ally of the organization, Andy Kim, has the other. If he wants a flag flown over the U.S. Capitol, he can make that happen.

The General – some call him that because of his initials, which are also the genesis of his super PAC, the General Majority PAC – had a challenging 2019 after a task force empowered by Murphy waged a war on tax credits awarded to his company under the previous administration.

For a little while last year, it seemed that the criticism of him was getting into his head. For the first time, he seemed just a little bit rattled.

Not anymore.

So far, the matter hasn’t really scarred Norcross. And lately, his relationship with Murphy’s staff has thawed. As Murphy prepares to seek re-election, Norcross no longer appears to be in his direct line of fire.

But wait, there’s more.

Norcross has influential friends in Washington, D.C. And while the U.S. House of Representatives and the White House are hardly his branch offices, the 2020 election has expanded his reach.

He enjoys longtime, close relationships with the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, and the President of the United States. Not too shabby. So, here we are, again, with George Norcross as #1 on the New Jersey Globe Power List – a spot he gets to squat in until someone takes him out, or until he decides he doesn’t want to be a powerbroker anymore.
A GLOBAL PANDEMIC CAN DEFINE a governorship. One of the big reasons Phil Murphy has transcended turned a precarious first year into strong approval ratings is his chief of staff, George Helmy.

When Helmy took over in early 2019, Murphy was struggling. He had spent his first year in office fighting with legislative leadership and has not completely connected with his constituents. There were threats of a Democratic primary challenge and too many comparisons to one of his predecessors, Jon Corzine.

Helmy has retooled the Office of the Governor.
He instituted a more corporate style of management, one consistent with his own experience in the private sector and similar to the one he used as state director to U.S. Senator Cory Booker. Helmy’s personality has meshed well with Murphy, who held high-level positions at Goldman Sachs before entering government.

The chain of command under Helmy’s predecessor was a bit murky. Now it’s completely clear. So is his personal fiduciary responsibility to the governor. Helmy is hugely competitive – there is no doubt about that – and he likes to win. But he appears to pull that off without a whole lot of hate in his bones. He’s more like Dick Cheney under Gerald Ford, rather than Cheney under George W. Bush. He doesn’t see ghosts. That seems to serve the governor well.

COVID-19 has propelled Murphy into a national figure and Helmy has emerged as a calm force during one of the most difficult periods every faced by New Jerseyans. Whether Murphy was right or wrong in his handling of the coronavirus pandemic is up to history – and the voters – to determine, but there is little doubt that all of the decisions have worked their way through a hugely disciplined, highly organized manager. Helmy took part in multiple one-on-one calls with White House officials, including Livingston-bred Jared Kushner, and the bond they forged may explain why New Jersey’s national interactions went far more smoothly than those in New York.

As a politician, Helmy falls somewhere between Booker and Bob Menendez. Insiders who deal with him say he is tough but fair. Like Booker, he can be kind and pleasant and thoughtful. Like Menendez, Helmy can punch someone right in the face if he needs to.

With Helmy by his side, Murphy has succeeded in getting his wish-list of issues: an increase in the minimum wage, equal pay for women, expanded gun safety laws, protection of reproductive rights, the legalization of marijuana, and a millionaire’s tax. He’s done it despite a sometimes hostile legislature run by fellow Democrats.

That doesn’t mean Trenton has been perfect since Helmy joined Team Murphy.

The governor’s relationship with Senate President Steve Sweeney remains strained, although they are communicating and doing a better job at hiding the Murphy/Sweeney disdain. There’s even an open line to George Norcross now. Helmy gets a lot of credit for that. But any notion of taking Sweeney out next year ended before it really even started. That happened on Helmy’s watch.

Still, Murphy seems a lock on the Democratic nomination for a second term. Helmy played a major role in eliminating the prospect of losing a primary during his first year on the job.

By this time next year, the 2021 gubernatorial race will be over. Ultimately, Helmy will be judged by Murphy’s electoral performance.

If Murphy wins re-election, he joins the ranks of Henry Luther, Greg Stevens and Kevin O’Dowd; if he loses, he joins Richard Wright and Edward McBride as the only chiefs of staff in New Jersey history to see their boss lose a general election.

So like any chief of staff, Helmy is likely to have some ups and downs next year as he battles both a pandemic and a Republican. Like his predecessors, Helmy’s power comes with his job. He knows that. And he knows how to wield it.
WHEN YOU LOOK AT Kevin McCabe, you can see a little bit of David Wilentz in him.

Wilentz was a legendary Middlesex political boss who knew how to manage Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague while maintain his independence and never giving the Hudson County Democrat everything he asked for.

The smart and disciplined Middlesex County Democratic Chairman has built a suburban political organization that rivals and sometimes outdistances some of his urban counterparts.
He's done it through alliances forged through strong personal relationships across the state and by maintaining a legislative delegation that votes as a bloc – and one that has expanded its tent to include legislators from other counties. He's got a reputation for policy smarts – he's learned some of that from his wife – exceptional political instincts, and for a New Jerseyan, a decent amount of benevolence.

McCabe's forceful leadership style complements Middlesex's most powerful elected official, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin. After nearly three years in his job, Coughlin has developed his sea legs and that has only served to expand McCabe's influence.

Now Coughlin has secured his job for another three years, giving Team McCabe extraordinary influence over state government.

He has negotiated a seat for Middlesex Democrats on the legislative redistricting commission, which could affect his county's manifest destiny for another decade. Less publicly, through Coughlin's two direct appointments, Middlesex will influence two-thirds of the Democratic side of congressional redistricting.

McCabe has maintained ties to Gov. Phil Murphy and his top staffers even when relationships were strained. These days, McCabe often gets what he asks for from a governor who needs to win Middlesex County in 2021.

He's also kept strong ties to South Jersey, something that fuels his reputation as a conciliator who can get along with everybody.

And his seat as a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey allows him to advocate for organized labor, for Democrats, and for Central New Jersey.

Locally, Middlesex Democrats continue to sweep countywide elections by massive pluralities while scoring big wins at the local level. He's also carefully navigated the emerging South Asian community in Middlesex.

Middlesex Democrats have avoided some of the traps that similar middle class counties across the nation have faced in recent years. That's mostly because McCabe has figured out how to stop the leakage and keep middle-of-the-road Democrats from voting Republican like they did when Chris Christie ran for governor in 2009 and 2013. Since McCabe has been county chairman, no Republicans have carried Middlesex above a municipal race here and there. Even those are few and far between in a county where local victories matter to McCabe.

Sayreville, perhaps one of the quintessential blue collar swing towns in New Jersey, now has a Democratic mayor for the first time in 20 years and supported Joe Biden by a 2-1 margin. Biden won 60% of the vote in Middlesex County.

For political bosses, McCabe is on the young side, but he's been around the game for more than 25 years – people forget he was once Commissioner of Labor – but he keeps gaining influence as someone who appears to sit in every important room in New Jersey.
Parano & Associates congratulates all on the 2020 NJ Globe Power List and wishes safety, security and hope to all in these challenging times.

“You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world’s problems at once but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.”

- Michelle Obama
AS PHIL MURPHY SEeks TO BECOME the first Democratic governor to win re-election since 1977, he’s again turning to his secret weapon: First Lady Tammy Murphy. When the governor announced the formation of a campaign committee in October, he installed his wife as his finance chair. There’s strong logic behind that move.

Tammy Murphy might be one of the most relentless political fundraisers in the United States.

In 2020, she raised millions for Democrats in New Jersey, for Democratic gubernatorial candidates across the country, and for President-elect Joe Biden.

Under normal circumstances, considering her fundraising successes, she might be short-listed for an ambassadorship or another federal post – the same route her husband pursued more than a decade ago when he was the Democratic National Committee finance chairman.

But Tammy Murphy isn’t bound for Washington or anyplace else. She’s got a full plate in New Jersey.

In early March, she dealt with a serious personal crisis when her husband underwent surgery to remove a cancerous tumor from his kidney. Just a few hours later, the first likely case of COVID-19 in New Jersey was announced.

As New Jerseyans began to feel the economic and medical effects of a global health crisis, the First Lady took on a new challenge as the founding chair of the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund.

Murphy spearheaded a massive $37 million fundraising effort that has already awarded more than $20 million in grants to New Jerseyans in need.

But her political and pandemic fundraising endeavors have not diminished her role as the governor’s most influential advisor. When she speaks, the governor and his staff listen.
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LEROY JONES IS APPROACHING the pinnacle of his political power.

Next June, as part of a deal cut last year to end a potentially fractious fight over the New Jersey Democratic State Chairman, Jones agreed to drop out of the race in exchange for a commitment to ascend to the position in June 2021.

On top of that, he will serve as the Democratic chairman of the New Jersey Legislative Reapportionment Commission that will redraw the state’s Senate and Assembly map. That job alone is one of them most influential in the state; it helps determine the destiny of his party for the next decade.

LEROY JONES, JR.’S ORBIT

Teresa Ruiz
Idida Rodriguez
John Currie
Dan Smith
George Helmy
Paul Juliano
Tony Vauss
Ted Green

Michael Soliman
Chris Durkin
Sean Spiller
Marie Blistan
Phil Murphy
Raymond Pocino
Angelo Genova
Michael Critchley

Sheila Oliver
Phil Alagia
Steve Sweeney
Bill Mullen
Craig Coughlin
Eliana Pintor Marin
Kevin McCabe
Patrick Torpey
Ras Baraka
Donald Payne, Jr.
Joe DiVincenzo
Mikie Sherrill
Brendan Gill
Britnee Timberlake

LEROY JONES, JR.
Essex County Democratic State Chairman
Jones’ special skill in politics is keeping smoldering embers from becoming forest fires, a talent he’s honed as a grandmaster of Essex County politics. He’s got a combination of intellect and street smarts. And he’s likeable.

Essex Democrats are a big tent party, with lots of egos and interests. Jones has been able to steer his party clear of large-scale infighting; under his leadership, no incumbent for any office has faced a serious primary challenge.

Among the tools that Jones wields is an ability to produce a mammoth number of votes for his candidates.

In 2020, Essex County produced a margin for Joe Biden of about 175,000 votes. To put that in perspective, the Essex number exceeds the President-elect’s combined pluralities in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Jones also knows what he’s doing.

Sometimes Democrats forget that as an assemblyman in the 1990s, Jones was fighting for progressive causes long before it became fashionable to do so.

Today, Jones is positioned to get just about anything he wants. He’s built a strong relationship with Gov. Phil Murphy and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, as well as New Jersey’s two United States Senators, Bob Menendez and Cory Booker.

Most importantly, he’s consistently shown a strong ability to make sure that every Democrat gets fed – as long as nobody rushes the buffet table and takes more than their share.

Jones will lead the state party Phil Murphy as seeks to win a second term. If that happens, he would be the first Democratic State Chairman to preside over the re-election of a governor since Richard Coffee did it in 1977.
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NEW JERSEY

DENNIS TRAINOR
CWA DISTRICT 1 VICE PRESIDENT

HETTY ROSENSTEIN
CWA NJ AREA DIRECTOR
HE’S ONLY BEEN CHIEF COUNSEL to Gov. Phil Murphy for a short time, but Parimal Garg is a prime example of a person whose political power stems directly from the position he holds. Just two months ago, his predecessor, Matt Platkin, would have been on the top ten list too. The occupant of the post Garg now fills will always be a powerful position. Every piece of legislation that passes the legislature touches his hands, and his review will largely determine whether it becomes a law or faces a veto. Every judge and prosecutor nominated by the governor will be vetted by his office.

Garg, 31, is one of the youngest chief counsels in New Jersey history, but he assumes this new post with some considerable experience. He had served as deputy chief counsel from Murphy’s first day as governor. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Garg has written more executive orders than anyone in New Jersey history.

He’s also the first non-white chief counsel in New Jersey history. The challenge for legislators, lobbyists and interest groups that deal with him is gargantuan, largely because Garg is an intellectual giant. He’s so smart that it’s as if Robert Wilentz, Steven Perskie and Stephen Wiley somehow had a child together.

The Harvard Law School graduate clerked for Chief Justice Stuart Rabner and worked at a top New York law firm before quitting his job to work for Murphy’s campaign for governor. It’s important to point out that Murphy was the third man in a three-candidate race. As chief counsel, Garg clearly has the trust of Murphy and Chief of Staff George Helmy. And in the short time he’s been on the job, nobody of any significance has lodged any major complaints against him. That in itself is historic.

The next part is more of a prediction than an explanation of his place on the New Jersey Globe Power List, and it’s here for posterity in the event that someone finds this list years from now and wants to mention it: Garg is exactly the kind of deep thinker who could wind up on the U.S. Supreme Court someday.
IF NEW JERSEY POLITICS were a game of Survivor, Kevin O’Toole would be walking away with $1 million. Few would have wagered that almost three years after Phil Murphy became Governor, O’Toole would still be occupying the chairmanship of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. At this point, it’s entirely possible that the former Republican state senator could outlast Murphy and hold the hugely influential appointed post when the 57th Governor of New Jersey takes office, either in 2022 or in 2026, if he wants to.

They key to O’Toole’s endurance is the personal relationships he still has with his former State Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle, something he spent more than 20 years building. Those connections have blocked Murphy from successfully appointing a single Port Authority commissioner since taking office.

No longer encumbered by the demands of running for public office, O’Toole has only increased his clout as a 56-year-old elder statesman of New Jersey politics. He’s also built a law firm that keeps multiplying lawyers every year. O’Toole has also gotten into the heads of some powerful political leaders. Just recently, newly-appointed Democratic members of a commission that will draw new legislative districts were forced to sign a contract pledging that they will vote as a bloc rather than allow one or two rogue members from cutting their own deal with the Republicans.

The informal name of the blood oath: “The O’Toole Rule.”

**KEVIN O’TOOLE**
Managing Partner, O’Toole Scrivo

**KEVIN O’TOOLE’S ORBIT**

- Steve Sweeney
- Al Barlas
- Teresa Ruiz
- Kevin McCabe
- Loretta Weinberg
- Brian Stack
- Joseph Lagana
- Nicholas Scutari
- Paul Juliano
- Steve Ororho
- Kristin Corrado
- Christopher Bateman
- Michael Doherty
- Rick Cotton
- Andrew Cuomo
- Joseph Lagana
- Joe DiVincenzo
- Peter Murphy
SOME POLITICAL LONGSHOTS have enormous benefits if things break in the right way. That’s what happened to Brendan Gill, a longtime political operative and local officeholder who has run three successful statewide campaigns in New Jersey. Gill signed on to manage Phil Murphy’s campaign for Governor back in 2015, when Murphy on a good day was the third man in a three-candidate Democratic primary. Along the way, Gill and Murphy grew close. Murphy credits him with navigating an extraordinary journey that helped him win. That comes with astonishing advantages, including uninhibited access to the most powerful man in New Jersey.

That kind of influence doesn’t come without some peril. Gill had a huge target on his back. There has been no shortage of people hiding with a shiv in their pocket and waiting for an opportunity to inflict some harm.

Gill remains a constant presence in Murphy’s administration and in his fledgling campaign for re-election. He has long-standing personal relationships with the governor’s top aides, and is playing a leading role in Murphy’s bid for a second term.

This is Gill’s third year on the Power List and comes with the usual disclaimer: he’s the only elected official on the list, an exception to a steadfast rule of only unelected powerbrokers. The reality is that his position as president of the Essex County Board of Freeholders is unrelated to his sway in Trenton.
IT’S UNUSUAL FOR SOMEONE to return to being one of the ten most powerful political insiders in New Jersey after an absence of more than a decade, but Bill Castner has done exactly that.

He was #9 when he served as executive director of the Assembly Majority staff in 2008, and #7 when he was Gov. Jon Corzine’s chief counsel in 2009.

Now he’s back atop the list as a wartime consigliere to Gov. Phil Murphy, Chief of Staff George Helmy, and Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. He’s provided the administration with institutional knowledge.
and the solid counsel of someone who has been a major player in New Jersey politics for two decades.

Castner’s return to the apex of influence in New Jersey comes with some fascinating twists and turns. In the first decade of the 21st century, he was an integral part of the South Jersey Democratic machine and a top advisor to George Norcross.

The two have split and Murphy was adept enough to sign a free agent.

There’s nobody in Murphy world with more golden dome experience than Castner, and few in New Jersey who are smarter and more strategic in their thinking. He’s played a major role in helping the governor rebound from a tough freshman year and put him on a path as a favorite for a second term.

This year, Castner shepherded the nomination of a close friend, Fabiana Pierre-Louis, as the first Black woman to serve on the New Jersey Supreme Court. The Senate confirmed her unanimously.

And Castner has forged alliances with other Democratic leaders across the state, especially in Middlesex County, that have profoundly helped Murphy’s internal politics.
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEW JERSEY GLOBE ON A SUCCESSFUL YEAR AND TO THE 2020 POWER LIST HONOREES.
NOTHING HAPPENS IN THE NEW JERSEY State Senate -- not a bill being considered, not a nomination being confirmed, not even a ceremonial resolution – unless Kevin Drennan signs off.

His power comes from being the 41st Senator. He’s the person the most powerful legislative leader in New Jersey, Senate President Steve Sweeney, trusts to run the Senate for him on a day-to-day basis.

Drennan is indefatigably loyal to Sweeney and won’t hesitate to throw a punch when Sweeney needs him to do so. In turn, Sweeney will knock someone out if Drennan needs him to. It’s a potent alliance.

A veteran of New Jersey politics for the last two decades, and a top Sweeney aide for most of the last eight years, Drennan has mastered the Senate and knows how to handle divergent challenges within his caucus. He can whip votes when he needs to.

The most impressive part of Drennan’s tool kit, one senator said, is that he doesn’t ever make a senator feel as though they’re just a functionary. He might be the 41st senator, that legislator said, but there are just 40 egos in the upper house.
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New Jersey’s largest public employee union has never been in a stronger position politically than it is right now under the leadership of Marie Blistan. That’s a dramatic turn from where the NJEA was less than three years ago, when Gov. Chris Christie openly fought public school teachers and Blistan. Now the union president is one of Gov. Phil Murphy’s most influential allies, with access earned through her wholehearted support of his candidacy in 2017. Since then, the NJEA has contributed at least $2.5 million to a non-profit group that promotes Murphy’s agenda, and at least $2.75 million to another non-profit allied with Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin. (Note: these numbers are nearly a year old, so it’s not clear how much money the NJEA gave to these non-profits in 2020.) Blistan now has a newly-forged alliance with a one-time foe, Senate President Steve Sweeney, extending her clout to the Big Three, and showing that in New Jersey, politics is a place where coalitions are always changing.
12

GREG LALEVEE
Business Manager, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825

The former crane operator has built relationships that will benefit his union for decades by staying loyal to the interests of his union members and those who vote to protect their interests.

13

MICHAEL SOLIMAN
Partner, Mercury

Nobody but Michael Soliman speaks for Bob Menendez in New Jersey. He’s run two winning U.S. Senate campaigns, and he’s skilled enough to navigate through the rough-and-tumble of a politically divided state to give counsel to Gov. Phil Murphy – and his staff – and Senate President Steve Sweeney.

14

HETTY ROSENSTEIN
State Director, Communications Workers of America

The self-described “union till the day I die” isn’t just a labor leader, but an activist with genuine core beliefs and an eagerness to fight for the issues she believes in – like a millionaires tax, her latest accomplishment.
15

**JULIE ROGINSKY**

President, Optimus Communications

Tough and smart, the take-no-prisoners Democratic strategist plays a key role in advising Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, Middlesex County Democratic Chairman Kevin McCabe, and Democratic powerhouse George Norcross.

16

**BILL STEPIEN**

Campaign Manager, Donald J. Trump for President

There is no New Jerseyan with as much access to the President of the United States than the former New Jersey political operative who started out as a driver on a U.S. Senate campaign 20 years ago. He's managed -- and won -- two statewide races in New Jersey, and still plays a key role in his home state as an advisor to two GOP House candidates -- and maybe to Phil Murphy's next opponent.

17

**MICKEY QUINN**

Democratic Political Strategist

All roads through South Jersey politics cross through the former deputy executive director of the Assembly Democrats, who has a seat at the table for every major political decision being made south of I-195 -- and sometimes north of that line.
“Our state has never faced a more difficult challenge than the COVID-19 crisis, and when we needed him the most, Governor Phil Murphy rose to the occasion. By putting our health and safety ahead of all other concerns, listening to science and following data, Governor Murphy has saved lives and helped us weather this unprecedented storm. **Now, he’s leading New Jersey forward, stronger and fairer than ever.**” – Chairman John Currie

**The New Jersey Democratic State Committee thanks Governor Murphy for his extraordinary leadership during the COVID-19 crisis.**

[Contact information]
“Our state has never faced a more difficult challenge than the COVID-19 crisis, and when we needed him the most, Governor Phil Murphy rose to the occasion. By putting our health and safety ahead of all other concerns, listening to science and following data, Governor Murphy has saved lives and helped us weather this unprecedented storm. Now, he’s leading New Jersey forward, stronger and fairer than ever.” – Chairman John Currie

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For the last 20 years, no Democrat has won statewide office in New Jersey without hiring these two longtime political consultants who continue to help guide Gov. Phil Murphy’s image.

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Partners, Message & Media

Government Affairs Counsel
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LeRoy Jones, Jr. / Idida Rodriguez / Patrick Torpey / Dan Smith
Mo Butler
Partner, Mercury

Mo Butler is one of the best-liked people in New Jersey. Once Cory Booker’s chief of staff -- as mayor and in the Senate -- Butler’s clout keeps growing as those he has mentored find themselves on the list of New Jersey’s most powerful.

Sue Altman
State Director, New Jersey Working Families

The leader of the progressive wing of the New Jersey Democratic Party is highly-regarded by the governor and his inner circle and has deftly placed herself inside the heads of some of Murphy’s intra-party rivals.

Kevin Hagan
Princeton Public Affairs

There isn’t a lobbyist in New Jersey with a stronger relationship to Senate President Steve Sweeney, which gives him the ability to move – or stall – legislation.
Raymond Pocino
Vice President and Eastern Regional Manager, Laborers’ International Union of North America

If New Jersey had a labor Hall of Fame, this respected union man of tremendous gravitas – and with an ability to direct money and boots on the ground for candidates he supports – would be one of the first to be inducted.

Frank Spencer
Second General Vice President, United Brotherhood of Carpenters

The onetime Camden County freeholder plays on a national stage as the head of a union that can move huge amounts of money to influence political campaigns.

Matt Platkin
Partner, Lowenstein Sandler

The former chief counsel to Gov. Phil Murphy has moved to a private law firm, but he continues to be an integral part of the governor’s inner circle and will be a major player in the 2021 re-election campaign.
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**Michael Muller**
President, Muller Public Strategies

The Democratic political consultant was well-connected enough to swing major endorsements to Mike Bloomberg and nearly win an open county convention for a presidential candidate who never connected with Democratic primary voters.

26

**Maggie Moran**
Managing Partner, Kivvit

The battle-tested head of a significant and fast-growing public affairs firm has a strong reach into Trenton – where she was a top staffer to Gov. Jon Corzine – and in New York, where she managed Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s 2018 re-election campaign.

27

**Gary Taffet**
Division President, Reliance Insurance Group

Once the chief of staff to the governor, Gary Taffet’s brains and political acumen has made him an important inside player in New Jersey politics.
There are five states with fewer people than Essex County, where the veteran of 18-years by the side of Joe DiVincenzo essentially makes him Essex County’s Lt. Governor.

The Republican chairman of the commission that will draw new legislative districts someday. He’s also the Essex County GOP Chairman, with a seat at lots of tables in important rooms up and down New Jersey.

As the Democratic County Chairman in New Jersey’s largest county, the sky’s the limit for this affable party leader who has built a relationship with the state’s most powerful political leaders while running a county where Democrats dominate.
CONGRATULATIONS

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31

DOUG STEINHARDT
New Jersey Republican State Chairman

A fierce voice for New Jersey’s minority party, it’s entirely possible that sixteen months from now, Doug Steinhardt could be governor and hiring the people who populate this power list.

32

ZAKIYA SMITH ELLIS
Chief Policy Advisor to the Governor

The former Secretary of Higher Education, Zakiya Smith Ellis has assumed a critical role in managing the governor’s policy shop – a post that often puts her in the room with the chief of staff and chief counsel when key decisions are being made.

33

BILL MULLEN
President, New Jersey Building & Construction Trades Council

If you’re loyal to the man who runs a group of fifteen building trades unions, then he’ll return that loyalty exponentially. And first among those to whom he’s loyal are his union brothers and sisters, a sharp contrast from his New York counterpart.
The team of Dan Bryan and Mahen Gunaratna has developed a media strategy during a global pandemic that led to a meteoric jump in popularity for Gov. Phil Murphy. The two astutely recognized that the key to helping New Jerseyans come to know and like their governor is through frequent network and cable TV appearances, radio interviews, thus going directly to thousands of people who watch his press briefings three times a week.
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No one is closer to George Norcross than his younger brother.

Phil Norcross
Managing Partner, Parker McCay;
Partner, Optimus Partners

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Especially our brothers and sisters in the labor movement who have joined EAS Carpenters in defending workers’ rights in New Jersey. Together we have ensured safer working conditions, elevated area standards, and enhanced apprenticeship training programs.

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The newly-elected mayor of Montclair gets his influence not from his local post, but from his position as the #2 official of the state’s largest public employee union. He’s widely viewed as the heir apparent to lead the union someday.
44

ANTHONY “SKIP” CIMINO
Executive Director, Assembly Democrats
The former state legislator and cabinet member runs the day-to-day Trenton operation of Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin.

JEFF MICHAELS
Partner, Optimus Group
Once the chief of staff to a Republican governor, Jeff Michaels is an important advisor to powerful South Jersey Democrats who appreciate his institutional knowledge and insights.

CRAIG GUY
Chief of Staff to the Hudson County Executive
Hudson County politics has always been a particularly difficult terrain, but Craig Guy seems to be enormously well-liked and known as someone who gets things done.
Gov. Phil Murphy’s point man with the legislature for the last three years gets to take some credit for some substantive policy wins, like the millionaires tax.

Charles Wowkanech
President, New Jersey AFL-CIO
He’s led a union with over 1 million members in New Jersey since 1997 and is just four years away from setting the record of as the longest-serving president of the state AFL-CIO.

Joseph Muniz
Hudson County Schools of technology/ N. Hudson Community Action Corp. Chairman
North Bergen Mayor/State Sen. Nicholas Sacco’s top political advisor has substantial clout throughout Hudson—particularly in Jersey City these days—and in Bergen County.

Justin Braz
Deputy Chief of Staff to the Governor
Gov. Phil Murphy’s point man with the legislature for the last three years gets to take some credit for some substantive policy wins, like the millionaires tax.
In South Jersey, there is no lawyer more politically connected, more trusted by his allies, and more feared by his rivals.

As New Jerseyans prepare to vote on a referendum to legalize adult-use marijuana, the former Burlington County assemblyman is positioned to strongly influence the future of the state’s economy.

The man responsible for Gov. Phil Murphy’s economic development will be a critical component for New Jersey’s fiscal recovery in a post COVID-19 world.
One of New Jersey’s most brilliant political strategists could wind up on top of the world if Jack Ciattarelli winds up becoming the next governor of New Jersey.

In a state full of checkers players, this hugely smart power lawyer is a master political chess player.

It’s hard to imagine not wanting Angelo Genova standing next to you in court.
“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”
-Winston Churchill

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In a way, he’s the Union County Executive – and he simultaneously serves as one of Nick Scutari’s top political advisors. Working closely with Democratic consultant Nick Fixmer, he’s a key player in major political campaigns in the state.
Steve Ayscue
President, Checkmate Advisors

There is nobody better at opposition research than this fearless South Jersey Democratic loyalist with a statewide reach and an uncanny ability to find a needle in a haystack.

Mark Longo
Director, Engineer Labor Employer Cooperative

This major player in New Jersey political campaigns is making Operating Engineers Local 825 one of the most formidable forces in the state.

Bill Pascrell III
Princeton Public Affairs

In New Jersey and nationally, he’s a big deal in the gaming space.
54

Brian Thompson

Reporter, WNBC-TV

He’s smart, he gets New Jersey, and millions of people watch his stories.

55

Bill Maer

Senior Partner, Public Strategies Impact

The next generation of one of Trenton’s most influential lobbying firms, with tentacles deep into the executive branch.

56

Patrick Murray

Director, Monmouth University Polling Institute

Even after becoming one of America’s most influential political pollsters, he still watches and analyzes the nuances of local races in his home state as closely as anyone.
Larry Weitzner
CEO, Jamestown Associates
One of the most sought-after political consultants in the country now works for Donald Trump and U.S. Senators; he’s come a long way from his days of moonlighting on local political campaigns while working for the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

Jeff Carroll
Staff Director, U.S. House of Representatives Energy & Commerce Committee
This Jersey guy has been a Frank Pallone staffer for nearly 20 years and now he runs one of the most powerful committees and one of the largest staffs on Capitol Hill.

Laurie McCabe
Chief of Staff, 19th Legislative District
During a global pandemic that has consumed the attention of every level of government, there’s nobody with more knowledge of the intricacies of how health care policy works in New Jersey.
Michelle Coryell
Chief of Staff, 3rd Legislative District

The Senate President’s gatekeeper can keep people from accessing one of New Jersey’s most powerful officeholders.

Sean Kennedy
Director, General Majority PAC

There isn’t a lot a whole lot the head of one of New Jersey most active and influential super PACs hasn’t seen over the last twenty years.

Amy Degise
Hudson County Democratic Chair

After two years as county chair, she’s helping to rebrand Hudson County from the legacy of Frank Hague and into a modern Democratic party organization.
When the President of the United States decides to sue you on an election matter, he's the one you call.

When it comes to discussing substantive public policy issues, there's nobody in the New Jersey media who offers a more careful, thorough and unbiased view.

The Democratic political consultant continues to increase his influence across the state while being the political spokesman for the governor.
66

**ADAM KAUFMAN**
Principal, Kaufman Zita Group

A truly genial and effective advocate for his clients with no real enemies – something astonishingly rare in New Jersey.

67

**KEVIN BROWN**
Vice President and State Director, 32BJ Service Employees International Union

A solid relationship with the Governor and key legislators keeps this longtime labor leader in a strong position of power.

68

**BRANDON MCKOY**
President, New Jersey Policy Perspective

Highly regarded for his intellectual and political skills, the head of New Jersey’s #1 think tank has become the unofficial policy arm of Democrats from State Street to municipal buildings.
Matt Friedman
Reporter, POLITICO New Jersey

He writes POLITICO’s New Jersey Playbook, a must-read daily briefing of what’s happening in the state. This extraordinarily well-trained serious journalist also has the best sense of humor in New Jersey.

Congratulations to the New Jersey Globe on another great year!

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Nine months into 2020...

Who’s with us?

Despite it all...
Congrats to David & NJ Globe for another stellar year covering “this thing of ours.” (RIP Nick)

Bill Spadea
Host, NJ 101.5

The fiery conservative media personality is on the radio four hours every day influencing thousands of New Jerseyans who are devoted to his take on the issues.

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NJG POWER LIST 2020
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Princeton Public Affairs

The head of a top Trenton lobbying firm stepped down this year as Somerset GOP Chairman, but his real power rests in his potential as a kingmaker next year if Jack Ciattarelli can beat Phil Murphy in the race for governor.

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David Wildstein
And The New Jersey Globe on a successful year!

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.,
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JOSHUA HENNE
President, White Horse Strategies

He’s the voice of the Communications Workers of America and advises several key players with a seat inside Gov. Phil Murphy’s inner circle.
He’s been respected and admired inside the statehouse for almost 40 years, and if Jack Ciattarelli becomes governor, he’s the front runner to become the next George Helmy.
ARThUR CIFELLI

Senior Partner, The Venn Group

After decades inside the room of some of history’s best political meetings, people up and down the state seek his counsel and advice.

MATT KLAPPER

Chief of Staff, U.S. Senator Cory Booker

The former firefighter and Yale Law School district has been with Booker since his high school internship at Newark City Hall. His brains and loyalty helped him move up the ladder in Bookerland and calls the shots on the senator’s national presence.

KATE MCDONNELL

Deputy Chief Counsel to the Governor

After spending eight years as general counsel in the Assembly Majority office, she’s now one of the most important lawyers in state government.
Jeanine Frisby-LaRue
Senior Vice President, Kaufman Zita Group

A storied career in New Jersey politics has helped make this lobbyist one of the strongest advocates in the state for causes she believes in.

Sean Darcy
President Round World Consulting

His three congressional clients won 83%, 83% and 90%, respectively, against aggressive primary opponents from the left – another strong cycle for this well-connected Democratic political consultant.

Saily Avelenda
Executive Director, New Jersey Democratic State Committee

The one-time grassroots activist who made Rodney Frelinghuysen hide and cry in 2018 has enjoyed a meteoric rise up the political ladder and is now part of the establishment running Phil Murphy’s state party organization.

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80

**JOE KYRILLOS**

Nemark, Knight Frank

After 30 years in the legislature, this youngish 60-year-old elder statesman continues to earn enormous respect by leaders of both parties.

81

**ROGER BODMAN**

Managing Partner, Public Strategies Impact

It’s been nearly 40 years since he managed Tom Kean’s campaign for governor, and after holding two cabinet posts, he’s one of the most successful lobbyists in the history of New Jersey.

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**IDIDA RODRIGUEZ**

Partner, 1868 Public Affairs

The veteran lobbyist and community organizer has a solid reputation as a can-do problem solver.
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DAVID PARANO
President/CEO, Parano & Associates
The Democratic political consultant is New Jersey’s King of Data.

MIDI BARAKA
Chief of Staff to the Mayor of Newark
The mayor’s brother runs New Jersey’s largest city.

CHRISS CHRISTIE
Partner, Christie 55 Solutions
The former governor’s sometime influence at the White House comes to an end on January 20, and his ability to sway public opinion is sadly negated by a cartoonish reputation in his home state.

UYEN “WINN” KHUONG
Executive Director, Action Together New Jersey
New Jersey’s Patron Saint of Vote-by-Mail has built a large and effective grassroots progressive group made up mostly of volunteers.
87

BILL CARUSO
Partner, Archer

A major player in the cannabis space, the former top Assembly Majority staffer could run New Jersey from a kayak if he had to.

88

TRISH ZITA
Principal, Kaufman Zita Group

Everyone seems to like this veteran lobbyist who has a reputation of getting things done.

89

HARRISON NEELY
Partner, Goldfinch Partners

The chief political strategist for the Senate Minority Leader and the Republican State Chairman is playing a major role in one of the most hotly contested House races in the U.S. – and maybe in next year’s gubernatorial campaign.
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MATT ROONEY
Editor, Save Jersey
The charismatic Camden County attorney has become the voice of young – and sometimes frustrated – conservatives in New Jersey.

91

ADAM SILVERSTEIN
Owner, Silver Strategies and Communications Group
The number one political consultant in Bergen County is close to Bergen Democratic Chairman Paul Juliano and Rep. Josh Gottheimer and managed Cory Booker’s record-setting re-election campaign.

92

ED DONNELLY
President, New Jersey State Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association
The head of the state’s firefighters union never hesitates to fight for his membership, no matter who he has to take on.
The second generation of The DeCotii – that’s plural for more than one DeCotii – have been political powerhouses in New Jersey for the last 40 years at the helm of a large North Jersey firm that includes Hunterdon Democratic Chair Arlene Quiñones Perez and DeCotii 3.0: Joseph M. DeCotiis III.

The former Burlington County GOP Chairman runs one of state street's top lobbying firms.
**ED FARMER**

President, Millennium Strategies

Rep. Bill Pascrell’s top political advisor runs a grant funding firm and has significant influence in Passaic County and Paterson.

**CANDY STRAIGHT**

Private Investor

Described by New Jersey Business as a Wall Street Wizard turned Movie Mogul, she is an A-list fundraiser for women’s groups and Republican women running for U.S. Senate across the U.S.

**RABBI SHMUEL BLECH**

Lakewood Vaad Leader

The head of Lakewood’s Orthodox Jewish community can move thousands of votes when he wants to, and would be much higher on a power list if his hometown wasn’t situated within safe Republican legislative and congressional districts. That means he shoots up if the someone really needs his votes in 2021.
John Currie
Passaic County Democratic Chairman; New Jersey Democratic State Chairman
The unofficial Passaic County Executive got the Governor of New Jersey to run through fire for him when it looked like he might lose re-election as state party chairman.

Scott Snyder
Consultant, SJS Consulting
One of the top political strategists for the Middlesex County Democrats, he has taken an increasingly active role coordinating the legislative agendas of one of the state's largest and most powerful Trenton delegations.

Bill Sproule
Executive Secretary/Treasurer, Keystone + Mountain + Lakes Regional Council of Carpenters
Major shakeups at the powerful Carpenters Union over the last few years that saw the forced departures of George Laufenberg and John Ballantyne has led to an amalgamation of influence for a guy who started out as a carpenter building Atlantic City casinos.